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Article

The formation of native land imagery in traditional Kazakh society: On the example of historical toponyms of Western Kazakhstan[1]

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of elements of the toponymic system of Western Kazakhstan in the context of the processes of territorial identification and the construction of images of the native land in traditional Kazakh society. The toponyms Zhaiyk and Mangistau played a key role in the history and culture of the Kazakh clans that were part of the Junior Zhuz. The region of Western Kazakhstan was not only a traditional place of nomadic settlement but also an important center of economic activity and cultural interaction.

The article examines the ethnic and historical-cultural aspects of the etymology of these toponyms, their connection with tribal migrations, and their role in the processes of forming the ethnic identity of the Kazakhs. Data from written sources, folklore, and historiographic analysis of scholarly literature reveal the marking role of toponymy in the western region of Kazakhstan – as indicators of ethnic boundaries, as a center of ethnic processes that took place here, and as evidence of interactions between individual groups of nomads from ancient times to the Middle Ages.

In the article, the authors employ interdisciplinary methods, including toponymic analysis, historical-comparative, ideographic, and historical-typological approaches. The theoretical framework for the study of toponyms is based on the concepts of "toponymic space," the historical and cultural landscape, and territorial identity.

The results of the research indicate that since ancient times, the modern territory of Western Kazakhstan has been a region of settlement for nomadic tribes, who developed it economically over thousands of years and filled the space with sacred meanings and mental categories. In this way, a "toponymic picture of the world" was created – closely

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linked not only to economic development but also to the parallel processes of the formation of ethnic consciousness among the Sarmatian-Massaget, Oghuz, and Kipchak ethnic communities. The “toponymic space” conceptualized by nomads can be understood as a description of their world, embodied in place names that have become ethnic symbols in the development of the territorial identity of an entire people.

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Дәстүрлі қазақ қоғамындағы туған жер бейнесінің қалыптасуы: Батыс Қазақстанның тарихи топонимдері мысалында

Аннотация. Мақала Батыс Қазақстанның топонимикалық жүйесінің элементтерін дәстүрлі қазақ қоғамындағы туған жер бейнесінің құрылымы мен аумағын анықтау процестерін зерттеу тұрғысында қарастыруға арналған. Жайық және Маңғыстау топонимдері Кіші жүз құрамындағы қазақ руларының тарихы мен мәдениетінде шешуші рөл атқарған. Батыс Қазақстан өңірі көшпенділердің дәстүрлі қоныстанған орны ғана емес, сонымен бірге экономикалық қызмет пен мәдени өзара әрекеттесудің маңызды орталығы болды. Мақалада топонимдердің этимологиясының этникалық және тарихи-мәдени аспектілері, олардың тайпалардың қоныс аударуымен байланысы және қазақтардың этникалық болмысының қалыптасу процестері қарастырылады. Батыс Қазақстанның белгілі топонимикасын талдау мысалында рулық аумақтарды қалыптастыру, шаруашылық байланыстар және этносаралық өзара іс-қимыл сияқты тарихи процестерді зерделеу үшін маңызды мәселелер қарастырылады. Жазба деректер, фольклор, ғылыми әдебиеттердің тарихнамалық талдауы Қазақстанның батыс өңірі топонимикасының этникалық шекаралар ретіндегі, осында өткен этникалық процестердің, ежелгі дәуірден бастап орта ғасырдағы көшпенділердің жекелеген топтары арасындағы өзара іс-қимылдардың орталықтары ретіндегі таңбалаушы рөлін көрсетеді. Мақалада пәнаралық зерттеу әдістері пайдаланылады, оның ішінде: географиялық атаулардың шығу тегі мен семантикасын зерттеу үшін топонимикалық талдау; жазбаша дереккөздер мен этнографиялық материалдардың деректерін салыстыру үшін тарихи-салыстырмалы әдіс; аумақты игерудің тарихи сипатын зерделеуге, қоныстандыру

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аймақтары мен көші-қон бағыттарын айқындауға арналған тарихи-типологиялық әдіс; оқиғалар мен кеңістіктің мәдени дамуының сипатын белгілеу үшін жүйелік талдау және тарихи қайта құру әдісі; объектіні тарихи-мәдени феномен ретінде сипаттауға арналған идеографиялық әдіс. Топонимдерді зерделеудің теориялық тәсілі «топономастикалық кеңістік» тұжырымдамасына, тарихи-мәдени ландшафт, аумақтық ұқсастық ұғымдарына негізделеді.

Зерттеу нәтижесінде ежелгі дәуірден бастап Батыс Қазақстанның қазіргі аумағы көшпенді тайпалардың қоныстану аймағы болғаны, оны мыңдаған жылдар бойы экономикалық тұрғыдан игеріп, кеңістікті ментальді категориялардың қасиетті мағыналарымен толтырды деген қорытындыға келеді. Осылай, экономикалық дамумен ғана емес, сонымен қатар сармат-массагет, оғыз, қыпшақ этникалық қауымдастықтары арасындағы этникалық сананың қалыптасуының параллель процестерімен тығыз байланысты «дүниенің топонимикалық суреті» жасалды. Уақыт өте келе бір-бірімен тілдік, экономикалық және мәдени жағынан жақын этникалық топтар тарихи қалыптасқан этномәдени кеңістіктің құрылысын көрсететін осы топонимдердің атауын мұқият сақтап қалды. Көшпенділердің көзқарасы бойынша құрылған "топономастикалық кеңістік" бүкіл халықтың аумақтық бірегейлігі ұғымының қалыптасуында этникалық белгілерге айналған атауларда бейнеленген олардың әлемін сипаттауды білдіреді.

Кілт сөздер: Батыс Қазақстан, Жайық, Маңғыстау, топонимика, ономастика, сакралды кеңістік, этникалық тарих, фольклор, көші-қон, мәдениет.

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Формирование образов родной земли в традиционном казахском обществе: на примере исторических топонимов Западного Казахстана

Аннотация. Статья посвящена изучению элементов топонимической системы Западного Казахстана в контексте исследования процессов идентификации территории и конструирования образов родной земли в традиционном казахском обществе. Топонимы Жайык и Мангистау играли ключевую роль в истории и культуре казахских родов, входящих в состав Младшего жуза. Регион Западного Казахстана был не только местом традиционного расселения кочевников, но и важным центром хозяйственной деятельности и культурного взаимодействия. В статье рассматриваются этнические и историко-культурные аспекты этимологии топонимов, их связь с миграциями племен и процессами формирования этнической идентичности казахов. На примере анализа

знаковой топонимики Западного Казахстана рассмотрена постановка проблемы таких важных для изучения исторических процессов вопросов, как формирование родовых территорий, хозяйственные связи и межэтническое взаимодействие. Данные письменных источников, фольклора, историографический анализ научной литературы показывает маркирующую роль топонимики западного региона Казахстана как этнических границ, как средоточия проходивших здесь этнических процессов, взаимодействий между отдельными группами кочевников с эпохи древности и в средневековье. В работе используются междисциплинарные методы исследования, включая: топонимический анализ для изучения происхождения и семантики географических названий; историко-сравнительный метод для сопоставления данных письменных источников и этнографических материалов; историко-типологический метод для изучения исторического характера освоения территории, определения ареалов расселения и маршрутов миграции; системный анализ и метод исторической реконструкции для установления событий и характера культурного освоения; идеографический метод для описания объекта как историко-культурного феномена. Теоретический подход к изучению топонимов основывается на концепциях «топономастического пространства», понятиях историко-культурного ландшафта, территориальной идентичности.

В результате проведенного исследования сделан вывод о том, что с глубокой древности современная территория Западного Казахстана была регионом расселения кочевых племен, осваивавших его экономически в течение тысячелетий и наполнявших пространство сакральными смыслами ментальных категорий. Так создавалась «топонимическая картина мира», тесно связанная не только хозяйственным освоением, но и шедшими параллельно в среде сармато-массагетских, огузских, кыпчакских этнических общностей процессов формирования этнического сознания. Сменявшие друг друга во времени родственные в языковом и близкие в хозяйственно-культурном плане этнические группы бережно сохраняли название данных топонимов, отражавших таким образом, конструирование исторически сложившегося этнокультурного пространства. Созданное в представлении кочевников «топономастическое пространство» означает не что иное как описание их мира, воплощенное в названиях, ставших этническими символами в становлении понятия территориальной идентичности целого народа.

Ключевые слова: Западный Казахстан, Жайык, Мангыстау, топонимика, ономастика, сакральное пространство, этническая история, фольклор, миграция, культура.

Introduction

Toponymy is one of the important types of historical sources. As a rule, natural objects provide researchers with information of various nature, from economic and household, to bioresource, ethnic, spiritual and sacred. Place names reflect the various historical circumstances and events in which they were created and transformed over time. Toponymy is the study of the origins, meanings, formation, and changes of place names. It is closely connected with linguistics, history, and historical geography. From a linguistic standpoint, toponymy provides essential material for the history of language, word formation, and historical lexicology. As an auxiliary science for history and historical geography, it offers valuable information for studying the settlement of regions, migration processes, ethnic

boundaries, and different types of settlements. Toponymic data are an indispensable resource for exploring the history of specific areas, the development of their economies, settlement patterns, and historical-geographical feature. Arising in certain historical periods and recorded in historical sources and folk tales, geographical names were chronological evidence of historical events. Toponyms can change over time: wars, population migrations, and ethnic contacts have left their mark on toponymy. Each historical era left its memory in the form of new names for natural objects. Toponyms arose under specific historical conditions, and their origins are closely connected with the social life and languages of the peoples who inhabited particular lands. In some instances, monuments of material culture have played a significant role in the formation of toponyms, and their study reveals the connection between toponymy and architecture. As a historical source, toponymy not only serves as a means of understanding the past but also represents a crucial element of cultural heritage.

In revealing the source meaning of toponymy, it should be noted that toponyms, as is well known, are a type of sign of geographical space, and in this context, the historical potential of toponyms has not yet been widely utilized in historical research. In this regard, studying the development of space by nomads through the analysis of topographic objects appears to be a promising direction. The examination of such issues as the nature and features of geospace development by ethnic groups in the course of historical processes, as well as questions concerning the ethnic history of individual regions – particularly those related to the study of ethnotoponymy using the methods and findings of related fields of historical research – can enable us to reach a new level in addressing the aforementioned problems. Thus, the aim of this article is to explore the processes of constructing ethnic and territorial identity through the analysis of the symbolic toponymy of Western Kazakhstan.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of "toponomastic space," introduced into scholarly discourse by the eminent linguist V.N. Toporov (Toporov, 1969: 31-50), allows the term to be filled with meaning and understood as the spatial representations of individual ethnic communities, shaped in accordance with the cultural values they invest during the active cognition of this space.

In this way, a distinct – often regionally specific – "onomastic space" is created and formed, which essentially reflects the modern concept of territorial identity (Guboglo, 2003; Zamyatin, 2004). The transmission of ethnocultural and territorial identity takes place through the spiritualization and sacralization of the "toponomastic space." In this sense, the toponyms examined in the present study emerge as onomastic dominants of territorial identity.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study is general scientific methods and special techniques of historical and related sciences. To achieve the goal of the study, the following methods and methodological techniques were used:

1) Toponymic analysis to study the origin and semantics of geographical names;

2) Historical-comparative method to compare data from written sources and ethnographic materials;

3) Historical-typological method to study the historical nature of the development of the territory, determining the areas of settlement and migration routes;

4) Systems analysis and the method of historical reconstruction to establish the events and nature of cultural development.

5) Ideographic method - description of the object as a historical and cultural phenomenon.

The study is based on a comprehensive approach, including an integrative approach to onomastic research and combining data from historical, linguistic and ethnographic sources. The theoretical approach to the study of toponyms is based on the concepts of "toponomastic space", the concepts of historical and cultural landscape, and territorial identity. The primary focus of the research process is the well-established position that geographical names can serve as a key to understanding ethnic history, since they record the areas of settlement of peoples.

Research background

The toponymy of Western Kazakhstan constitutes a vital domain of interdisciplinary inquiry, situated at the intersection of historical geography, ethnolinguistics, and cultural anthropology. Place names function not merely as components of linguistic systems but also as repositories of historical memory, preserving evidence of key stages in ethnogenesis, migration processes, transformations of sociocultural space, and the sacralization of the landscape.

One of the famous scholars in the study of Kazakhstan toponymy is E. Koichubaev, author of the Brief Explanatory Dictionary of Kazakh Toponyms, which offers etymological interpretations of numerous geographical names, including those from the Western Kazakhstan region (Koichubaev, 1974). Considerable attention to the problems of Kazakhstani toponymy has also been given in the works of A. Abdrakhmanov (Abdrakhmanov, 1975), T. Zhanuzak (Zhanuzak, 2021), and other researchers whose studies have address ethnonymy, toponymic etymology, and the broader framework of Kazakh onomastics.

The historiographic value of regional toponymy is further reflected in the research contributions of linguists, geographers, and historians such as K. Ammaniyazov (Ammaniyazov, 2004), M. Kozhanuly (Kozhanuly, 2005), U. Yerzhanova (Yerzhanova, 2016), B. Koshimova (Koshimova, 2010), S. Kondybay (Kondybay, 2002), S. Azhigali (Azhigali, 2001), M. Sembi (Sembi, 2012), and others. Recent regional studies underscore the importance of localized toponymic analysis aimed at identifying correlations between microtoponyms and the historical-cultural dynamics within specific administrative territories.

In this context, the toponymy of Western Kazakhstan emerges as a complex historical and cultural phenomenon, the analysis of which requires a comprehensive methodological framework integrating linguistic, historical, archaeological, and ethnographic perspectives. Nonetheless, despite the substantial body of accumulated data, the toponymic landscape of Western Kazakhstan remains fragmented particularly with respect to the medieval period. The integrative approach adopted in the present study distinguishes it from previous works, framing of ethnoterritorial space not only as the result of active transformation of the natural landscape by human agency, but also the transformation of the toponomastic concept into a cognitive-emotional category of the process of formating ethnic and territorial identity.

Analysis

A comparative analysis of medieval toponymy with historical sources, which has led to a number of intriguing hypotheses about the past of Kazakh tribes, has allowed some researchers

to suggest the existence of a connection between the genealogical names of the tribes of the Junior Zhuz and the geographical place names of Western Kazakhstan. The territory of Western Kazakhstan in different historical periods was the place of settlement of many tribes, which, in turn, left their mark in some geographical names. They preserve the history of the formation of the ethnic territory of the Kazakh people, but also reflect the inextricable link with the origins of the concept of "ancestral land" in the Turkic ethnocultural tradition. An example of such a feature is the toponymic system of the Kazakh steppe, preserved since antiquity, which has served as a symbolic guide to natural and historical sites sacralized in collective memory. This system embodies the distinctive model of spatial orientation developed by nomadic societies.

The region, sacralized in the popular consciousness – “Ak Zhaiyk” – is considered one of the key centers of ethnogenesis and cultural genesis of the Kazakh people. This region, located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, was an important space for cultural and historical interactions between nomadic and sedentary peoples. The Ak Zhaiyk region has been the object of study of historians, travelers and geographers since ancient times (Umitkaliyev and others, 2020). The earliest information about the Zhaiyk River is found in the work "Geography" by Claudius Ptolemy. In the 2nd century AD, the ancient Greek geographer compiled a map of Asia, where the river is called *Daix (Yaik)* and flows into the Caspian Sea (Thomson, 1953: 410). Researchers associate this hydronym with the Dahi/Dai tribes, who left their mark on the ethno- and toponymy of the Caspian region (Smirnov, 1977; Machinsky, 1971).

The written mention of this river, dating back to the 10th century, is associated with the famous mission of Ibn Fadlan to the Volga Bulgaria, as part of the embassy of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir. The embassy's route ran through the territory of Central Asia, Khorezm and the Oghuz steppes. In his account of this journey, Ahmad ibn Fadlan noted: “We stayed among the Pechenegs for one day. Then we continued on and made a stop at the Jaikh River, which is the largest river we had ever seen, with the strongest current. Indeed, I saw a travel bag that overturned in it, and those who were inside drowned. A great number of our people perished, and several camels and horses were also lost. We managed to cross it only with great difficulty” (Kovalevsky, 1956: 130).

On the orders of the Pope, the Italian monk Plano Carpini, who was sent to Mongolia (1245-1247), wrote: “We traveled across the entire land of the Cumans, which is a vast plain and contains four great rivers: the first is the Piper (Dnieper), the second the Don, the third the Volga, and the fourth is called the Yaik” (Carpini, 1957: 70-71). Thus, the river known in different historical periods as Daiks, Daik, or Jaikh has preserved its ancient name to this day in its Kazakh form – Zhaiyk.

In an attempt to reveal the meaning of the sacred space, researchers turn to the etymology of the hydronym "Zhaiyk". According to Ye. Koichubaev, this toponym goes back to the common Turkic *yai+yk,* where the base *“yai”* means “summer”, and the affix *-yk* either clarifies the meaning or forms the derivative *yai+yk*, interpreted as “wide riverbed”. In a number of Turkic languages, the concept of “summer pasture” is represented by the lexemes *yailak, yailyu, eylag,* while in modern Kazakh the form zhailau is used, and in Kyrgyz – *zhailoo.* In Russian literary sources, this hydronym is known under the names *«Yaik-reka», «reka Yaitskaya»* (Koichubaev, 1974: 89).

A. Abdrakhmanov offers an alternative version of the origin of the toponym "Zhaiyk", according to which its basis is the root *"zhai",* from which the Kazakh verbs *"zhaiyu"* and

"zhaiylu" are derived. As a result of adding the affix *"-yk"*, the hydronym "Zhaiyk" was formed (Abdirakhmanov, 1975: 95-96).

The Brief Encyclopedic Dictionary of Historical Toponyms of Kazakhstan also provides information that the floodplain of the Zhaiyk River has been used since ancient times by nomadic Turkic tribes as summer pastures (zhailau, zhaiylym) for cattle, and that during the spring flood, the river overflows (zhaiylu), and the name Zhaiyk is associated with this characteristic phenomenon (a contamination of the words and concepts "overflowing", "to graze", "the presence of cattle on a pasture", "summer pasture") (Kratkii entsiklopedicheskii slovar..., 2014: 159).

In Kazakh mythology, there are many legends dedicated to the origin of local toponyms of Western Kazakhstan, which are associated with the land of the Kazakhs, but at the same time draw parallels with the Turkic mythological tradition. The origins of the name of the hydronym Zhaiyk (Yaik) go back to the myth of the Great Flood. For example, the ancient Turks and Altai people called this righteous man Zhaiyk-nama. When the whole Earth was flooded by the Great Flood, on the western side of Mount Kazygurt, on a small flat area, the ship-ark of the prophet Nuh (Noah) landed, on which all animals and beasts were saved from the great water, a pair from each species of animals, in order to continue life on Earth after the flood. Nuh (Weeping Prophet) is Zhaiyk (flood) in Kazakh or Zhaiyk-nama in Kazakh folklore is identified with a man named Zhaiylgan. Zhaiyk is a part of Tengri in human form, Tengri ordered him to protect people from all evil. According to legend, after Zhaiyk-nam's death, people began to bring sacrifices to him. In the spring, a white sheep is sacrificed to him on the mountain. On the 40th day after a person's death, the Turks call on Zhaiyk Khan to cleanse the yurt and tie a rooster (a symbol of death) to the bed. And if the cattle decreases after the death of a person, who, according to belief, can lead cattle to the next world, they call on Zhaiyk Khan, who can lead the cattle out by causing a flood there (Zhanaidarov, 2006: 66-69).

In the mythology of the southern Altai people, Zhaiyk (Dyayik / Yaik) is a spirit-intermediary between the higher light spirits and people, the patron of the family and livestock (Karunovskaya, 1935: 163). Researchers believe that "Yaik, a deity originally tribal, gradually transformed into a family patron spirit, a guardian of the hearth." The etymology of the word Yaik/Zhaiyk thus goes back to the ancient Turkic basis and is associated with religious sacred semantics (Tyukhteneva, 2009: 169).

"Ak Zhaiyk" as a symbol of the native land is sung in the works of zhyraus. The idea of an existing distant land, which is a place of refuge and a distant homeland, is reflected in the epic of the Nogai circle "Orak-Mamai":

"Kaptagan el nogaily
Baitak zhatkan el edi.
Yedil – Zhaiyk eki su,
Agasy nogay kalyn nu,
Nagashy halyktyn zheri edi"
(The numerous Nogais
Lived [earlier] in prosperity.
Yedil-Zhaiyk, two rivers,
Between them the Nogai were like a dense forest,
This land was the Motherland) (Babalar sozi, 2006: 313).

Batyr Dospambet perceives it as a symbol of his native land:
“Ainalayyn Ak Zhaiyk,
At salmay oter kun kaida?!
Ensese biik boz orda
Enkeye kirer kun kaida?!”
(Oh, my beloved Zhaiyk!
When will this moment come,
So that we saddle our horses
And race between two fires?!)(Bes Gasyr, 1989: 33-34).

The idea of the native land, which is a place of refuge and homeland, was reflected in the Kazakh poetry of the 19th century, a bright representative of which is the batyr, the poet Makhambet Utemisov:
“Zhaiyktyn boyy kok shalgyn,
Kuzermiz de zhailarmyz.
Kulisti sondy kurendi
Kudireytip kunde baylarmyz.
Kudai isti ondasa,,.
Isim zhonge kelgende,
Kamalagan kop dushpan
Ali de bolsa, kulday kylyp aydarmyz”
(Zhaiyk is covered with meadow grass,
We will spend autumn and summer here.
We will keep good horses,
Grazing in this greenery!
And if Tengri helps us,
Supports us in a just cause,
Like sheep, we will drive the enemies
Beyond our native lands!) (Bes Gasyr, 1989: 186).
“Yedildi korip emsegen,
Zhaiykty korip zhemsegen.
Taudagi tarlan shubar biz edik”
(Having seen the Yedil, we were sad,
Having seen Zhaiyk, we suffered.
We were a motley leopard from the mountains) (Bes Gasyr, 1989: 187).
“Yedil ushin egestik,
Tepter ushin tebistik.
Zhaiyk ushin zhandastyk,
Kigash ushin kyryldik,
Tendikty, maldy bermedik,
Tendiksiz malga konbedik”
(For our Yedil we fought with the enemies,
For our land we fought with the strangers.
For Zhaiyk we stood in a battle to the death,
We did not give up our native land to the enemy,
No herds, no fat flocks, no freedom,

But we went out to fight slavery in the open field) (Bes Gasyr, 1989: 187).

Thus, through poetic appeal in the presentation of pictures of the native land, the Kazakhs' vision of the world order is revealed, in the center of which are located, first of all, the so-called "sacred loci", namely "... the banks of Zhaiyk, Ana Yedil".

In a pair with Zhaiyk, Yedil («Atil») is often mentioned, which together with it forms a dual system, as the core highways of the earth-homeland, which is recorded in epic legends.

In Bashkir legends, Zhaiyk-Yedil are presented as brother and sister, which emphasizes their symbolic relationship and significance (Bashkirskiye, 1985: 33). Even in Constantine Porphyrogenitus (10th century), “Jeikh”, along with “Atilus”, is used to describe the places of Pecheneg nomadism (Konstantin Bagryanorodnyy, 1989: 155). Abu-l-Ghazi writes about Nuh sending Yafes to the banks of Itil and Yaik, and Oghuz sending Kipchaks to the Don, Itil and Yaik (Kononov 1958: 39). However, the most striking manifestations of the connection between the two rivers are found, perhaps, in monuments that contain echoes of the times of the Golden Horde (Ilyassova, Nogaibaeva, 2024).

Researcher V.V. Trepavlov points to the symbolic role of natural objects in the sacred topography of the Ulus of Jochi, especially in relation to the Volga (Itil) and Yaik rivers, which are regularly mentioned in historical and folklore sources as the boundaries of ethnic identity and areas of cultural memory (Trepavlov, 2011: 195-196).

Finding a homeland on the Yedil is a common theme in Turkic folklore. It is also noticeable in numerous versions of the Oguz-name, a collection of ethnogonic legends of the Turks. According to the Persian chronicler Rashid ad-Din (early 14th century), the forefather of the Turkic peoples, Oguz Khan, ordered the Kipchak tribe to settle on the banks of the Atil and Yaman-su. The aim was to force the rebellious tribes there to resume paying tribute to Oghuz. The Kipchaks obeyed the khan and began collecting tribute for him. "From then on the Kipchaks settled there as a yurt, and the country was assigned to them" (Rashid ad-Din, 1987: 62-63).

The famous saying of Asan Kaigy reveals the essence of the nomad's philosophy about the value of the native land. In his poetic lines, rivers are endowed with the function of material abundance and social harmony:

“Yedil menen Zhaiyktyn,
Birin zhazga zhaylasan,
Birin kyska kystasan,
Al kolyndy malarsyn
Altyn menen kumiske!”
(If you settle between the rivers Yedil and Zhaiyk,
You will spend the summer on the first,
You will spend the winter on the other,
All that remains for you to do is to dip your hands,
Into gold, and even into silver!) (Bes Gasyr, 1989: 23)

The description of his native land given by Kaztugan-zhyrau in the late Middle Ages continues the traditions of early heroic tales: “Stepnaya zemlya beskonechna, kak vremya... Zemlya - cherno-beloy ordy poselen'ye...Zemlya, gde obrezali mne pupovinu, Zemlya, chto obmyla menya, obstirala...Zemlya, chto menya ot vragov ukryvala. Zemlya, na kotoroy verblyudami stali obrosshiye sherst'yu gustoy verblyuzhata...Vo mrake tabunshchikam spat' ne dayut do rassveta vzmetennyye ryby, lyagushki i raki. Takov dorogoy moy Yedil'

nezabvennyy.” (“The steppe land is endless, like time... The land is the settlement of the black and white horde... The land where they cut my umbilical cord, The land that washed me, cleaned me... The land that sheltered me from enemies. The land on which camels overgrown with thick wool became camels... In the darkness, the herders are not allowed to sleep until dawn by the tossed fish, frogs and crayfish. Such is my dear unforgettable Yedil...”) (Poety pyati vekov, 2003: 29).

Thus, the image of Yedil and Zhaiyk in the Turkic tradition is not limited to geography – it forms the basis of sacred topography, reflecting ideas about the homeland as the center of the world, ethnic identity and historical memory.

Another significant land for nomads, praised by medieval poets, is the historical and geographical region of Western Kazakhstan, Mangystau (Mangyshlak).

The etymology of the toponym “Mangystau” reflects the complex historical processes that took place in the region, including migration and ethnocultural interactions (Söylemez et al., 2024). It is believed that the earliest mention of the name Mangystau appears in the works of Arab and Persian travelers of the 10th century, such as al-Istakhri, Ibn Fadlan, al-Umari, and others. Al-Istakhri mentions Siyah-Kuh (“Black Mountain”) as the largest settlement in the area, a name by which the Mangystau Peninsula was known in Persian sources. Indeed, the mountain ranges called Karatau stretch from the west of Ustyurt to the east, through the middle of the Mangystau Peninsula. This location lay along important trade routes connecting the Islamic world with Khazaria. In his account, al-Istakhri observes that Siyah-Kuh was the only inhabited place in the region at the time. He reports that a group of Turkic people had recently established themselves there following a conflict with the Oghuz. As a result of this hostility, they withdrew from the Oghuz and chose this area as their new place of residence, which offered access to water sources and grazing lands (Materialy po istorii..., 1939: 169). In the context of the period under consideration, the Turks apparently should be understood as the Pechenegs. According to sources, at the end of the 9th century, the Pecheneg tribes suffered a serious defeat from the Oghuz and Khazars, as a result of which they were forced to leave the territories of the Northern Aral Sea region and the Volga-Ural interfluve. Some of these tribes migrated not only to the southern Russian steppes, but also to the territory of Mangistau. According to al-Istakhri, the Turks who settled in the Mangistau region (Siyah-Kukh) later became known as “Mangyshlaks” (Materialy po istorii..., 1939: 169). Al-Istakhri’s account of the “Mangyshlak” tribe is corroborated by Bekran’s work Jahan-nama. According to this source, the Mangyshlak were one of the Turkic tribes that, as a result of conflicts with the Oghuz, were forced to abandon their former territories and migrate to the region of Siyah-Kuh, located near the Caspian Sea (referred to as the Abaskun Sea). Upon discovering water sources and suitable grazing lands in the area, the tribe settled there permanently (Materialy po istorii..., 1939: 349).

In the treatise Mas‘ud’s Code by al-Bīrūnī, the toponym “Yan-kh-shlag” is mentioned in the description of the fifth climate zone. According to researchers, this name corresponds to the Mangyshlak region, known for its characteristic mountain formations – Karatau and Aktau. The indication that this territory belonged to the Khazar Khaganate highlights its significant geostrategic importance. The geographical position of the steppes of Western Kazakhstan, including the Mangyshlak region, created favorable conditions for the development of trade networks between the Volga region and the political entities of Central Asia (Mandelshtam, 1971: 165). In an 11th-century source authored by Mahmud al-Kashgari, the name “Man-

Kyshlak" is recorded, which closely resembles the modern toponym. The author notes that this area was located within the territory controlled by the Oghuz (Materialy po istorii..., 1939: 311). The toponym Mangyshlak also appears in the works of Ibn Najib, Ibn al-Athir, Rashid al-Din, and al-Umari dating from the late 13th to 14th centuries (Omarbekov, 1965: 18-19). These sources indicate that the name Mangystau (Mangyshlak) has been known since very ancient times.

The name Mangystau consists of two components. While the meaning of the first element, man, remains uncertain, the second component – kyshlak or kystau – differs phonetically but essentially represents two variants of the same term. The former is characteristic of Oghuz languages, while the latter is typical of the Kazakh language (Omarbekov, 1965: 19). The Hungarian scholar A. Vambery in his work "Journey through Central Asia" examines the etymology of Mangyshlak; in ancient times it was called Ming-Kishlak, i.e. "a thousand winter quarters" (Vambery, 1865: 165).

S. Azhigali interprets the term "Mangyshlak-Mangystau" by emphasizing the economic and historical role of the peninsula as a major wintering area for nomadic tribes, which emerged in the early 2nd millennium AD. He suggests that the meaning of the name should be derived from this context: the first component, "man", is understood as "sheep", and the second, "kystau", as "wintering place" or "winter hut". Accordingly, Mangystau can be interpreted as a vast region designated for wintering livestock (Azhigali, 2001: 32).

The toponymic landscape of Mangystau preserves numerous traces of historical interactions in the form of place names linked to various tribal groups. Throughout the medieval period, Mangystau was part of the migration routes of Turkic tribes. During the 10th to 12th centuries, the ethnic history of the tribes later associated with the Junior Zhuz was closely intertwined with several major political entities, such as the Khazar Khaganate and the Oghuz tribal confederation. These states exerted a significant influence on the sociocultural and political processes unfolding in the territory of Western Kazakhstan, contributing to the formation of the region's ethnic structure and the consolidation of certain tribes within its boundaries. Their interaction with local Turkic tribes – through both military and trade contacts – played a crucial role in the transformation of tribal organization and the political consolidation of the Turkic-speaking population. In the Oghuz language, the word "ada" translates as "island" – a term the Oghuz used to refer to the Mangyshlak region, also known as Siyah-Kuh. It is assumed that the population of this area later came to be known as the Aday people. Based on this, scholars have proposed a hypothesis suggesting that ethnic elements previously part of the Western Turkic Khaganate – and later forming the Aday tribe – had already been integrated into the Oghuz tribal confederation by the 9th century. According to a number of researchers, it was during the 9th–10th centuries that the Daiy (or Aday) people settled in the Mangyshlak region. This development aligns with the theory suggesting that some of the tribes of the Junior Zhuz trace their origins to the Daha-Massageta lineage. Taking into account the key provisions of this theory, one can find interesting parallels between the Kazakh tribe Sherkesh and the Circassians of the North Caucasus, who call themselves Adyghe. These similarities may reflect deeper historical and ethnic ties rooted in the era of early Iranian-speaking and Turkic interactions, as well as cross-migration processes in the steppe and foothill zones.

A. Margulan, who extensively studied the toponymy of the Kazakh region in relation to the ethnogenesis of the Oghuz and their influence on the formation of Kazakh tribes, repeatedly highlighted the historical importance of the territories once inhabited by the Oghuz and

later by the Kipchaks. Over time, these lands became part of the ancestral domain of the Kazakh tribes, particularly the Baiuly tribes of the Junior Zhuz. This includes the traditional nomadic areas of Mangystau, the Caspian Sea coast, and the region along the Zhaiyk River. Such observations make it possible to trace the continuity in the settlement and cultural transformation of these territories within the framework of complex ethnopolitical processes. *"Caspi Tenizi, Mangystau, Zhaiyk Sui - Mine Abylgazynyn korsetui boyynsha, ogyz ben kypshak, kanlylardyn meken etken ortasy osy olkeler" ("The Caspian Sea, Mangystau, and Zhaiyk river-these are the lands where the Oghuz, Kipchak, and Kanly peoples lived, according to Abylgazy")* (Margulan, 1985: 200).

The toponym Mangystau is regarded not only as a geographical region, but also as a distinctive sacred space within Kazakh cultural consciousness - an aspect that finds particularly vivid expression in the oral and poetic heritage of akyn-zhyraus.

As a symbol of the native land, it is sung by the akyn-zhyrau Kalniyaz:

"Bakasy koidai shulagan,
Balygy taidai tulagan,
Atyrau men Akzhaiyk,
Boyynda talay oinagan,
Mangystaudyn salasy,
Koralap koydy aidagan,
Ar koranyin ishinde,
Mynnan saulyk kozdagan,
Ar zhelinin basynda,
Zhuzden kulyn bailagan,
Tuyp osken zher edi-au"
(Frogs croaked loudly, like sheep bleating,
Fish splashed in abundance, like herds jumping.
Atyrau and Akzhayik -
on their banks numerous games were played.
Flocks of sheep were driven across the lands of Mangystau,
In each pen a thousand sheep gave birth to lambs,
a hundred mares gave birth to foals.
This was my native land!) (Kalniyaz, 2016: 71).

He also quotes the following lines describing nostalgia for his native land:

"Zhuremiz boten elde kalay etip,
Eriksiz bozbalany malay etip?!
Zhigittin egesse de eli zhaksy.
Tastalyk bul qonysty talak etip.
Mangystau – Atameken, Ustirt – Zhailau,
Baramyz on bes kunde, koshsek, zhetip..."
(How will we live in a foreign land,
Where a young man becomes a servant against his will?..
Even in a dispute - but his homeland is dearer to every horseman.
Let's leave this camp, let's finally renounce it.
Mangyshlak is the fatherland, Ustyurt is the summer pasture,
We'll set off on our way - and in fifteen days we'll get there…) (Kalniyaz, 2016: 72).

The nomadic population regarded this land as a sacred space. In the traditional worldview of the nomads, the land was not merely a physical territory or a natural landscape, but a living, sacralized entity. Throughout the life cycle, it was conceptualized as a sacred archetype, representing the image of the "native land." In the poetic legacy of Murat Monkeuly, the idea of the homeland is expressed through the notion of unity:

"Yedildin boiy – kandy kiyan,
Zhaiyktyn boiy – maily kiyan,
Mangystau boiy shandy kiyan,
Adira kalgyr ush kiyan!
Ush kiyannyn ara boyinan
Zheti zhurt ketip zhol salgan.
Zheti zhurttyn ketken zher,
Kayyrsyz bolgan netken zher?!"
(The land of Yedil is our heavy home,
The land of Zhaiyk is our peaceful home.
Mangystau is a dusty home,
All three homes, may you be damned!
They lived here, they passed here, like smoke,
Seven nations one after another.
On the hard, unfaithful land
How many nations have disappeared in the darkness!
They rustled through it, like streams?!) (Zheti gasyr zhyrlaydy, 2008: 355)

Murat Monkeuly believed that the loss of these lands would be a tragedy for the Kazakh people:

"Yedildi tartyp algany,
Etekke koldy salgany,
Zhaiykty tartyp algany,
Zhagaga koldy salgany,
Oyildy tartyp algany,
Oydagysy bolgany,
Mankystaudyn ush tubek,
Ony dagy algany,
Urgenish pen Bukharga,
Arbasyn suyrep bargany,
Konystyn bar ma kalgany?!
Mal menen basty eseptep,
Balanyn sanyn algany,
Angarsanyz, zhigitter,
Zamanany tagy da,
Bir kyrsyktyn shalgany!"
(Having taken away Yedil,
They took her by the hem.
Having taken away Zhaiyk,
They took her by the collar.
Having taken away Oyil,
They achieved everything.

Having taken away three capes on Mangistau,
They creaked on their carts
To Urgench and Bukhara.
So what do we have left now?
If they made a census of people and cattle -
This is also not a good sign.
It means that our time has been corrupted) (Zheti gasyr zhyrlaydy, 2008: 356)

Thus, these examples demonstrate how in the works of the zhyrau, Zhaiyk, Mangystau is depicted not only as a native land, but also as a sacred space reflecting the historical and spiritual significance of the region for the Kazakh people.

Results

Data from medieval written sources indicate that since ancient times, the modern territory of Western Kazakhstan was a region of settlement of nomadic tribes, who developed it economically over the course of thousands of years and filled the space with sacred meanings of mental categories.

Consequently, a “toponymic world-view” emerged, closely connected not only with economic development, but also with the parallel processes of ethnic consciousness formation among the Sarmatian-Massaget, Oghuz, and Kipchak ethnic communities. The ethnic groups that replaced each other in time, related in language and close in economic and cultural terms, carefully preserved the names of these toponyms, thus reflecting the construction of the historically formed ethnocultural space.

The etymological analysis of the toponymic units cited in this study as marking the western region of Kazakhstan, Zhaiyk and Mangystau, which has been undertaken by scientists on numerous occasions, leads to one conclusion that these toponyms refer to the locations of winter and summer camps of ancient nomads. This in turn reveals the meaning and cultural value of these names preserved in ethnic memory in the structure and, in general, organization of the geographical space of the nomadic world.

A systematic analysis of written sources and folklore data was undertaken, enabling the reconstruction of the stage-by-stage formation of culturally marked topographic objects in the ethnic history of the region. The "toponomastic space" created in the minds of the nomads signifies no more than a description of their world, embodied in names that subsequently became ethnic symbols in the formation of the concept of territorial identity of an entire people.

Conclusion

The formation of toponyms is closely related to the specific historical conditions of their origin. The naming of ancient geographical objects, the study of their etymology on the territory of Kazakhstan is often determined by the era of dominance of certain ethnic groups that played an important role in the political history of the steppe region. The economic development of the territory by nomads over a long period of time contributed to the formation of stable ideas about clan estates. The boundaries of these estates were defined by geographical features such as rivers and mountains, as well as places of seasonal migration.

In this regard, some natural objects have become symbolic landmarks, developed over the centuries by numerous generations of people and forming a single image, that is important in the ethnocultural understanding of modern-day Western Kazakhstan. The region's toponymy reflects historical processes, including the socialization of spatial loci.

Data from written sources, folklore and historiographic analysis of scientific literature show that played a key role in marking ethnic boundaries and as a center of ethnic processes that took place here, as well as interactions between nomadic groups in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Analysis of toponymic data of the region shows that the formation of ethnic consciousness of nomads was associated with their development of space, the essence of which is reflected in the historical written and oral folklore heritage.

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